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SUBJECT: NEW INDIAN DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR
SIGNALS OPENNESS TOWARD BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IN INITIAL
COURTESY CALL

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Geoffrey Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In an initial courtesy call on incoming Deputy National Security Advisor L.K. Ponappa, Charge highlighted U.S. priorities for the bilateral security relationship and invited Ponappa to visit Washington at the earliest convenience to begin building contacts with USG counterparts. Ponappa admitted to being new to the job and in training mode, but signaled an openness toward building the bilateral relationship. End Summary.

India's First Female DNSA

¶2. (C) Charge paid a courtesy call on May 23 on new Deputy National Security Advisor (DNSA) Leela K. Ponappa. The first Indian woman to be appointed as the Deputy National Security Advisor, Ponappa is the former Ambassador to the Netherlands and Thailand, as well as a career Foreign Service Officer with extensive experience in South Asia. She also served as Consul at the Indian Consulate in San Francisco 1979-82. She took over her DNSA responsibilities just three weeks prior to Charge's call, and admitted that she was still in familiarization mode, trying to learn the structure and issues of her new office.

Just Getting Started On The Job

¶3. (C) Charge encouraged Ponappa to travel to the U.S. at her earliest convenience to meet key counterparts, noting that the personal relationships between the Indian National Security Advisor's office and U.S. National Security Advisor's office have facilitated resolving several sticky issues over the past several years. Ponappa was non-committal about traveling, pointing out that she is still in the introductory phase to her job, but said she would look into the possibility in the coming months.

Charge Pushes For Action On Key Issues

¶4. (C) Turning to substantive issues, Charge highlighted U.S. priorities for advancing the bilateral relationship, focusing

on opportunities for closer coordination in defense, counterterrorism, civil-nuclear cooperation, and regional issues. Charge brought particular attention to some of the functional agreements which are pending and reportedly awaiting National Security Council Secretariat (of which Ponappa serves as the Secretary) approval, including the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Logistics Support Agreement (LSA). He also pressed for Indian action on participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and Counterterrorism Information Sharing Working Group. It was evident that Ponappa did not have a deep understanding of the issues, however her engagement reflected an openness and willingness to be cooperative with us.

¶15. (C) Ponappa and the Charge discussed the volatile situation in Pakistan (Ponappa served as MEA's Pakistan Undersecretary from 1976-79). Both agreed that our national interests lie in stability in Pakistan, and Charge described the helpful role Pakistan has played in the Global War On Terror. Similarly, Ponappa agreed with Charge's assessment that India has an acute interest in Afghanistan's successful reconstruction, pointing out that India's relationship with Kabul goes back millennia.

¶16. (C) Ponappa ended the meeting by thanking the Charge for bringing to her attention the key issues at hand in the bilateral relationship, and reiterated her commitment to working closely with us to build upon the positive momentum created in recent years.

PYATT